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1881



Address at the memorial services of  
James A. Garfield, in New York,  
By Chauncey M. Depew.



Class

Book

# ADDRESS

AT THE

## MEMORIAL SERVICES OF JAMES A. GARFIELD,

BY THE

GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC,

AT

Chickering Hall, New York,

*September 20, 1881,*

BY

HON. CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW.

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ALBANY:

THE PRESS CO., PRINTERS, 18 BEAVER ST.

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MY FRIENDS:

We have met together many times in the long years past on occasions serious and trifling, sad and joyful, for the hot discussion of politics, for the purpose of commemorating historical and patriotic events, and to strew with flowers and eulogiums the graves of our heroic dead; but never before have we assembled when we were only the units of universal and all-embracing grief. The world is in tears. The sun, in its course, has for the past two months greeted with its morning rays a never ending succession of kneeling millions supplicating the heavenly throne to spare the life of

General Garfield, and during the last few days it has set upon them bowed in sorrow for his death. This intense interest has been limited by neither boundaries nor nationalities. It has belted the globe with mourning. Why has this calamity touched the chords of universal sympathy? Heroes and statesmen have died before, but never before have all civilized people felt the loss their own. The glory of the battle-field has mingled exultation with the soldier's agony. Statesmen have closed a long and distinguished career, but the loss has been relieved by the reflection that such is the common lot of all. Lincoln's murder was recognized as the expiring stroke of a dying cause. The assassination of him who was the saviour of Holland, and the hope of the liberty of his time was felt to be the fruit of implacable feud and religious strife; but the shot at Garfield was the most causeless, purposeless and wicked crime of the century. No section, no party, no faction desired his death. It had no accessories in public vengeance or private malice. The President was a strong, brave, pure man in the prime of his powers; the trusted executive of fifty millions of people; the title to his office unquestioned, and the nation unanimous in the purpose that he should develop his policy and fulfill his mission. Such a life and career so ruthlessly broken arouses horror and sympathy. But the love, reverence

and sadness of this hour is due to the fact that the man himself, in his strength and weakness, in his struggles and triumphs, in his friendships and enmities, in his relations to mother, wife and children, and in his battle with death, was the best type of manhood. He was not one of those historical heroes, with the human element so far eliminated that, while we admire the character, we rejoice that it exists only in books and on canvass, but a man like ourselves, with like passions and feelings, but possessed of such greatness and goodness, that the higher we estimated him, the nearer and dearer he became to us. In America and Europe he is recognized as an illustrious example of the results of free institutions. His career shows what can be accomplished where all avenues are open and exertion is untrammelled. Our annals afford no such incentive to youth as does his life, and it will become one of the republic's household stories. No boy in poverty almost hopeless, thirsting for knowledge, meets an obstacle which Garfield did not experience and overcome. No youth despairing in darkness feels a gloom which he did not dispel. No young man filled with honorable ambition can encounter a difficulty which he did not meet and surmount. For centuries to come great men will trace their rise from humble origins to the inspirations of that lad who learned to read by the light of a

pine-knot in a log cabin; who, ragged and barefooted, trudged along the tow-path of the canal, and without ancestry behind to impel him forward, without money or affluent relations, without friends or assistance, by faith in himself and in God became the most scholarly and best equipped statesman of his time, one of the foremost soldiers of his country, the best debater in the strongest of deliberative bodies, the leader of his party and the Chief Magistrate of fifty millions of people before he was fifty years of age. We are not here to question the ways of Providence. Our prayers were not answered as we desired, though the volume and fervor of our importunity seemed resistless; but, already, behind the partially lifted veil we see the fruits of the sacrifice. Old wounds are healed and fierce feuds forgotten. Vengeance and passion which have survived the best statesmanship of twenty years are dispelled by a common sorrow. Love follows sympathy. Over this open grave the cypress and willow are indissolubly entwined, and into it are buried all sectional differences and hatreds. The North and the South rise from bended knees to embrace in the brotherhood of a common people and reunited country. Not this alone, but the humanity of the civilized world has been quickened and elevated, and the English-speaking people are nearer to-day in peace and unity than ever before.

There is no language in which petitions have not arisen for Garfield's life, and no clime where tears have not fallen for his death. The Queen of the proudest of nations, for the first time in our recollection, brushes aside the formalities of diplomacy, and descending from the throne, speaks for her own and the hearts of all her people in the cable to the afflicted wife, which says: "Myself and my children mourn with you."

It was my privilege to talk for hours with General Garfield during his famous trip to the New York conference in the late canvass, and yet it was not conversation or discussion. He fastened upon me all the powers of inquisitiveness and acquisitiveness, and absorbed all I had learned in twenty years of the politics of this state. Under this restless and resistless craving for information, he drew upon all the resources of the libraries, gathered all the contents of the newspapers and sought and sounded the opinions of all around him, and in his broad, clear mind the vast mass was so assimilated and tested that when he spoke or acted it was accepted as true and wise. And yet it was by the gush and warmth of old college-chum ways and not by the arts of the inquisitor that when he had gained he never lost a friend. His strength was in ascertaining and expressing the average sense of his audience. I saw him at the Chicago convention, and whenever

that popular assemblage seemed drifting into hopeless confusion his tall form commanded attention and his clear voice and clearer utterances instantly gave the accepted solution.

I arrived at his house at Mentor in the early morning following the disaster in Maine. While all about him were in panic he saw only a danger which must and could be repaired. "It is no use bemoaning the past," he said, "the past has no uses except for its lessons." Business disposed of, he threw aside all restraint, and for hours his speculations and theories upon philosophy, government, education, eloquence; his criticism of books, his reminiscences of men and events have made that one of the white-letter days of my life. At Chickamauga he won his major-general's commission. On the anniversary of the battle he died. I shall never forget his description of the fight; so modest, yet graphic. It is imprinted on my memory as the most glorious battle-picture words ever painted. He thought the greatest calamity which could befall a man was to lose ambition. I said to him, "General, did you never in your earlier struggle have that feeling I have so often met with, when you would have compromised your whole future for a certainty, and, if so, what?" "Yes," said he, "I remember well when I would have been willing to exchange all the possibilities of my life

for the certainty of a position as a successful teacher." Though he died neither a school principal nor college professor, and they seem humble achievements compared with what he did, his memory will instruct while time endures.

His long and dreadful sickness lifted the roof from his house and family circle, and his relations as son, husband and father stood revealed in the broadest sunlight of publicity. The picture endeared him wherever is understood the full significance of that matchless word "home." When he stood by the Capitol, just pronounced the President of the greatest and most powerful of republics, the exultation of the hour found its expression in a kiss upon the lips of his mother. For weeks in distant Ohio she sat by the gate, watching for the hurrying feet of the messenger bearing the telegrams of hope or despair. His last conscious act was to write a letter of cheer and encouragement to that mother, and when the blow fell she illustrated the spirit she had instilled in him. There were no rebellious murmurings against the Divine dispensation, only in utter agony: "I have no wish to live longer; I will join him soon; the Lord's will be done." When Dr. Bliss told him he had a bare chance of recovery, "Then," said he, "we will take that chance, doctor." When asked if he suffered pain, he answered: "If you

can imagine a trip-hammer crashing on your body, or cramps, such as you have in the water, a thousand times intensified, you can have some idea of what I suffer." And yet during those eighty-one days was heard neither groan nor complaint. Always brave and cheerful, he answered the fear of the surgeons with the remark: "I have faced death before, I am not afraid to meet him now;" and again, "I have strength enough left to meet him yet"—and he could whisper to the Secretary of the Treasury an inquiry about the success of the funding scheme and ask the Postmaster-General how much public money he had saved.

His first thought when borne to the White House was not for himself, but for his wife sick at Elberon. He sent her an assuring message, bidding her come, received her with a cheerful and smiling welcome, and when she had left the room he said to the wife of a Cabinet Minister, "How does Crete bear it?" "Like the wife of a true soldier," was the reply. "Ah, the dear little woman!" he exclaimed; "I would rather die than that this should cause a relapse to her." Scanning with loving eyes her watchful and anxious face weeks afterwards, he drew down her head and whispered, "Go out, dear, and drive before the sun gets too hot; I would go with you if I didn't have so much business to attend to; you will, I am sure, excuse me."



Forbidden to talk, he established with his life-long friends and constant watchers, General Swaim and Colonel Rockwell, a system by which, in the knowledge gained by the intimacy of years, single words stood for ideas.

Williams College Commencement, to which he was going when he was shot, was mentioned. The old familiar Alumni assemblage became present to his mind, and what were they saying of him? "Tenderness?" he said to Rockwell. "Measureless," was the reply, and he had gathered the spirit of that memorable meeting. In answer to an inquiry General Swaim said to me: "The most hopeful, courageous and calm observer of the case is General Garfield himself. He has so completely eliminated his personality, that he thinks and acts as if General Garfield had unusual and extraordinary opportunities to study the condition of the President of the United States, and an uncommon duty to preserve his life."

As he lay in the cottage by the sea, looking out upon the ocean, whose broad expanse was in harmony with his own grand nature, and heard the beating of the waves upon the shore, and felt the pulsations of millions of hearts against his chamber door, there was no posing for history and no preparation of last words for dramatic effect. With simple naturalness he gave the

military salute to the sentinel gazing at his window, and that soldier returning it in tears will proudly carry its memory to his dying day, and transmit it to his children. The voice of his faithful wife came from her devotions in another room, singing, "Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah!" "Listen," he cries, "is not that glorious?" and in a few hours Heaven's portals opened and upborne upon such prayers as never before wafted spirit above he entered the presence of God. It is the alleviation of all sorrow, public or private, that close upon it press the duties of and to the living.

The whole nation unites in smoothing the path-way of the revered and beloved mother, and caring for the noble wife and her children. But, as citizens, let us remove from our institutions the incentives to assassination. The President is of one school, the Vice-President of another. The President of the Senate next in succession is of one party, the Speaker of the House of the other. A million of needy or ambitious men besiege the President for the hundred thousand places in his gift. In a change is a perpetual opportunity to retrieve a failure, and murder forever lurks in this concentration and distribution of patronage. Let the President be the constitutional ruler of the republic and the civil service placed on a business basis. Let us render our cordial support to him who under these try

ing circumstances succeeds to this high office. "God reigns and the Government at Washington still lives," was the Christian soldier's shout with which General Garfield stopped the maddened mob when Lincoln was killed. Arthur is President. He needs the confidence and encouragement of the people, and will prove worthy of the trust which has devolved upon him. The tolling bells, the minute guns upon land and sea, the muffled drums and funeral hymns fill the air while our chief is borne to his last resting place. The busy world is stilled for the hour when loving hands are preparing his grave. A stately shaft will rise, overlooking the lake and commemorating his deeds. But his fame will not live alone in marble or brass. His story will be treasured and kept warm in the hearts of millions for generations to come, and boys hearing it from their mothers will be fired with nobler ambitions. To his countrymen he will always be a typical American citizen, soldier and statesman. A year ago and not a thousand people of the Old World had ever heard his name, and now there is scarcely a thousand who do not mourn his loss. The peasant loves him because from the same humble lot he became one of the mighty of earth, and sovereigns respect him because in his royal gifts and kingly nature God made him their equal.















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